

REPORT FROM COUNTY COUNCILLOR JOHN REYNOLDS 26th FEBRUARY

BUDGET DOES THE RIGHT THING FOR CAMBRIDGESHIRE COMMUNITIES

Developing Cambridgeshire's economy, helping people live independent and healthy lives and supporting and protecting the vulnerable are at the heart of the County Council's spending plans for 2012/13.

The Council has listened to the public and produced proposals to increase spending in adult social care, invest in improving roads, transport and broadband, provide more school places as well as boosting business and housing.

Following a public consultation it is also proposed to raise Council Tax by 2.95 per cent to protect vital front line services as supported by residents and avoid a multi-million funding gap in the future.

The proposals include £610 million of capital investment over the next five years to make sure Cambridgeshire is open for business and to support prosperity, jobs, education and economic growth.

Councillors have back the £849 million budget and make £43 million savings following Government cuts of almost 25 per cent to the Council's revenue grant over the last two years. The proposals also confirmed the planned reduction of up to 154 full time equivalent posts from the County Council as announced to employees in November.

The budget includes an increase on last year of £6.4 million for Adult Social Care to protect the most vulnerable in society - some £188.5 million will be spent on Adult Social Care

Also the budget includes capital investment:

- * An investment of an extra £90 million over five years to improve the road network, increase safety and keep Cambridgeshire moving - this means a total of £33 million will be spent this year.

- * Children's services will spend £77 million, mainly on providing additional school places.

The budget is also designed to help boost business and the local economy with a £20 million investment in superfast broadband, £26 million for vital transport measures such as Chesterton Station and £29 million for a new link road to solve the Ely level crossing problem.

The extra money also will be spent on:

- * Securing library services and transforming them to provide a twenty first century service.

- * Providing an additional £100,000 for support to carers and a further increase in funding for the voluntary and community organisations such as the Care Network, to support volunteering

- * Protecting school crossing patrols

- * Promoting cycle training in schools - so it will be free at point of use

- * Continuing the U project which helps year 11 pupils progress into education, employment or training.

Previous plans to reduce subsidised bus services will be phased over three years. This will be accompanied by a £1.5 million investment in targeted local transport schemes to make sure where possible alternative options are available before subsidised services are reduced.

The Council is already a very lean organisation in comparison with other councils and achieved £50 million savings last year. This includes working smarter and working with partners more, such as shared services with Northamptonshire County Council.

To make the required savings the Council will have to reduce its costs and work in different ways to deliver some services. Savings it makes in some areas will be reinvested in services to make sure tax payers are getting the most for their money.

Residents said in a public consultation they would be prepared to pay more in council tax to preserve essential services.

Councillors have listened to the public and suggested a Council Tax rise of 2.95 per cent to make sure extra investment can be made into vital front line services such as adult social care.

This means rejecting the one off payment offered by Government to councils to freeze Council Tax for this year. Taking this one off payment would have led to the Council having to make even more savings this year but an even greater increase in council tax in following years.

The rise still means Cambridgeshire has one of the lowest Council Tax rates in the country. If the Council were to take the money on offer from Government, it would leave the authority with a multi-million hole in its budget that would grow larger, to around £30 million over the next five years.

Councillor Nick Clarke, leader of Cambridgeshire County Council, said: "At the heart of this budget is the desire to do what is right for Cambridgeshire and our communities while meeting the challenging savings targets. We have listened closely to what residents have said and our proposals reflect our drive to promote Cambridgeshire as a place which is open for business and can lead UK PLC to recovery while providing local jobs and prosperity.

"We are protecting the most vulnerable in our society by investing more in adult social care while working harder to drive down savings and work better with partners to improve the quality of life and health for residents. We are pushing forward investment in roads and much needed major transport infrastructure to meet the growing demands of the County and keep business and residents moving. At the same time we are saving libraries and finding ways to better provide community transport.

"But it is a major challenge to make savings whilst investing where residents want us to. That is why we have listened to residents who said they would be prepared to pay more to protect services. Putting up Council Tax is right for Cambridgeshire. The alternative is a massive multi-million funding hole to fill in the future which would no doubt hit our most vulnerable residents. The increase means a Council Tax Band D household paying £30.87 a year more for County Council services.

The Government has offered to give Councils a one off payment this year rather than put up council tax. This equates to a rise of 2.5 per cent. However, as a one off payment this would not be available the following year and therefore to keep the services as they are and plan for inflation councils would be forced to hike up council tax by a greater amount the following years.

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SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITY OF THE A14 CHALLENGE

Local authorities from across Cambridgeshire have come together to put forward a joint response on how to solve the issues of capacity, congestion and safety on the A14. The A14 Challenge, launched last year by the Department for Transport, asked organisations, businesses and residents to give their ideas on how to improve the A14 corridor.

In response, the County and District Councils in Cambridgeshire have looked at a number of different issues taking into account the national, regional and local importance of the road, the need to support the world class economy of the area and address the environmental issues of new infrastructure.

In conclusion, the Councils have put forward the following proposals in response to the Government's A14 Challenge:

- * The need for major highway improvements on the A14 between Girton, Fen Drayton and the A1/ A14 at Ellington. Funding options are also explored, including some form of tolling, as private finance may be needed to at least part fund the cost of construction.
- * New highway infrastructure to carry local traffic and access villages and towns in the A14 corridor which would be free to use
- * The removal of the Huntingdon Viaduct and reconfiguration of the town centre roads to improve access to Huntingdon and connection with the emerging Alconbury Enterprise Zone.

Cllr Nick Clarke, Leader of Cambridgeshire County Council, said: "The A14 Challenge is a unique opportunity to put forward innovative and radical solutions to resolve the many problems which the A14 causes our residents and businesses as well as those using it for longer distance travel. By putting forward the idea of a tolled road for long distance traffic while giving local residents the option of a local road; we believe we have found a solution which meets the needs of us all. Our county and region have the capacity to drive forward the nation's economy but only if we put in place the infrastructure which will support this growth. Our response to the A14 challenge shows how determined we are to tackle this issue once and for all."

Cllr Ray Manning, Leader of South Cambridgeshire District Council, said: "There is simply not enough tarmac on the A14 for the amount of traffic using this important route now and in the future, and major investment is needed to improve safety, and to make sure growth and our local economy is not strangled."

POLICE AUTHORITY AGREES 2.92 PER CENT COUNCIL TAX INCREASE

Members of Cambridgeshire Police Authority last night voted in favour of a 2.92 per cent increase in the policing part of council tax (precept).

The increase amounts to around ten pence per week for a Band D household. The recommendation comes after weeks of engagement with the public and discussion with the constabulary over whether or not to accept a one off grant offered by the government to freeze council tax at the current level.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said: "This year (2011-12), around £165 per person is being spent on policing in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. This is the second lowest of the 43 police authorities. If we were centrally funded at the average there would be another £16m available to us. As a result we have the fifth lowest number of police officers per head of population and the third lowest number of police staff."

“Despite this level of funding we continue to punch above our weight dealing with above average recorded offences and with sanction detections at 30 per cent.

“The discussions which led to our decision were about doing right by our communities as a whole. Our job is to secure an efficient and effective police service for the people of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough in future years. We want to hand over not only balanced budget to the new Police & Crime Commissioner in November, but also leave a firm foundation of which Cambridgeshire Police Authority can be proud. I believe that our decision reflects that.”

The increase in council tax enables the Police Authority to plan for maintaining 50 operational staff posts in 2012-13. In autumn 2010 the government announced massive reductions in public spending for the four year period 2011-12 to 2014-15. In December 2010 the government announced how much grant it would give to the Police Authority in 2011-12 and 2012-13. Over the two years Cambridgeshire will get about £11m less than previously (5% to 6% less per annum). In the following two years (2013-14 and 2014-15) we expect the reductions to be slightly less severe.

The Authority's net spending this year (2011-12) is £130m. Of this, £47m (36 per cent) is financed by local council tax payers and the balance of £83m (64 per cent) by government grant. The policing element of the current Band D council tax is £169.56 per year (£3.26 per week). This amount will rise to £174.51 per year. Cambridgeshire Constabulary has already identified £11m of the £17m currently estimated to be required over four years.

STREET LIGHTING - UPDATE

The County Councils partnership with Balfour Beatty will provide new modern lighting which saves energy and reduces operating costs for many years to come. Funded by Central Government, it enables us to replace most of Cambridgeshire's street lighting, much of which is in poor condition. Without this investment, the current street lighting stock would have further deteriorated and led to increased maintenance costs.

The new light will use “white light”, which will improve night time vision and use less energy, meaning that overall, the number of street lights can be reduced. Lights can be dimmed during hours when there is little traffic or pedestrian activity to save energy.

Government required us to reduce the number of street lights by on average 10%. There are specific requirements for lighting on main roads and therefore less scope to reduce the lighting. This means that in some areas, the number of lighting columns will be reduced by more than 10%. However, in most cases, the reduction in lighting columns will be mitigated by the higher quality light and taller columns.

The Council and Balfour Beatty will talk to communities and businesses about the renewal of street lighting in their area and discuss options before making decisions.

Dimming of street lights late at night will save, 8.5m kilowatts of electricity each year and a reduction of over 4,500 tonnes carbon emissions each year.

Revenue savings of £2.559m in 2011/12 and £1.689m in 2012/13

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ON TRACK TO MOVE SCIENCE PARK STATION FROM CONCEPT TO REALITY

The green light has been given to move long-held plans for a new rail station in Cambridge from concept to reality by County Council. The station, to be called Cambridge Science Park, will be built on the Chesterton Sidings site to the north of Cambridge.

The County Council and its partners have been developing the plans for the station on the basis that the station could be provided commercially and paid for from rail ticket revenues. To allow early delivery, initial capital funding for the station will be provided by the County Council and then recouped from the train operating companies over a number of years.

A letter just received by Council Leader Nick Clarke, from Theresa Villiers MP, Minister for Transport confirms that as long as the station continues to have a positive business case and generates enough revenue to repay its cost then it will be included in the next rail franchises that operate on the London, Cambridge, Ely, Kings Lynn line.

Work undertaken by the County Council shows that the business case for the station is very strong and so this is the key to ensuring that the County Council can secure back its capital investment and will allow the development of the station proposals to proceed. On this basis the Council are willing to push ahead now with investment to bring the station forward as soon as possible. Investment for the station forms part of the County's budget that will enable early delivery of the station. Construction on site is planned to start in early 2014, with an opening date planned in late 2015.

The station will have three platforms, and will be served by at least four hourly southbound trains (to Cambridge and London) and three hourly northbound trains (to Ely, Kings Lynn and Norwich). The Busway will be extended into the site from Milton Road, providing an interchange for frequent onward services to St Ives and Huntingdon, and for local bus services. Pedestrian and cycle routes to the station will be provided to the site from the Science Park and the surrounding area, and a car park and a large cycle park will also be provided.

The station will provide a huge boost for the local economy, and will kick start development and the creation of jobs by significantly improving accessibility and journey times. The much improved links to London for high-tech companies based in the north Cambridge/Science Park area will make this an even more attractive place for businesses to grow and locate.

With the planned links to the Busway this will also provide rapid journey times to and from the planned new town of Northstowe, and create an economic growth corridor between Cambridge and Huntingdon and the enterprise zone at Alconbury. It will also bring significant benefits for local residents in north Cambridge and to the wider community. as around 80% of vehicles currently using Cambridge station emanate from north of the city, the new station will also intercept these journeys and help to reduce congestion in and around the city centre and so bring benefits for all.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said: "I am delighted with the progress that has been made and the positive view that has been taken by Theresa Villiers MP, Minister of State for Transport. The support of the Local MPs and the City and District Councils has been invaluable in enabling us to make the case for the station and highlight the massive economic benefits it will bring for Cambridgeshire and the wider region.

Rail Minister Theresa Villiers said: "We welcome Councils looking at innovative ways of bringing transport improvements to their local area and look forward to working with Cambridgeshire County Council on moving this project forward."

Ray Manning, Leader of South Cambridgeshire District Council, said: "A number of councils and MPs have been campaigning hard for a railway station at Chesterton for some time, and it is a great boost for our residents and businesses that plans now look set to now become a reality. This link will make it easier than ever for people in South Cambridgeshire to get in and out of London and will only make our district even more attractive for organisations looking to find an area to call home."

"The news today that Chesterton Station is another step closer to reality is great news for our economy. Not only will it provide a direct public transport link to

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LEARNIG DISABILITY DAY SERVICES IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE SET TO CHANGE

Plans to transform the future of Learning Disability Day Services in Cambridgeshire have been announced. Following consultation with the people that use the existing service, plans have been developed that will provide an opportunity to transform the service whilst restructuring management and making back office savings.

Over the coming months, the users of the learning disability day service will see a number of improvements of a range of services and support to enable choice and flexibility according to individuals needs. For example, providing access to work opportunities - something which users said was a priority for them. Other improvements include modernising buildings and making special adaptations to meet the needs of the people who use them.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds said "Feedback identified a need for changes to make the current service more suitable to individual need. This means improvements to make sure we can respond to current and future needs of our service users –putting them at the heart of the service.

"The changes proposed will see better use of buildings, also allowing centres to be used as community resources. The transformation of day services will maximise individual's potential, whilst improving their access and integration with their local community.

"Our priority for our service is to keep people safe, supporting and protecting them when they need it most and ensuring that those with particularly high support needs are not put at risk but are given better opportunities and greater control, helping them to live independent and healthy lives in their communities."

COULD YOU BE A BUDDY?

Volunteers are needed to help provide basic IT and internet skills to the over 50's. Could you spare a couple of hours a week to help Cambridgeshire County Council's Computer Buddy scheme that runs in local libraries?

The scheme, providing free one to one sessions, is part of Cambridgeshire County Council's drive to provide a range of services for the communities they serve, not just a place to find books. In particular volunteers are needed in Ramsey, Cottenham and Soham.

Maggie Brown, EngAGE Project Co-ordinator for Cambridgeshire County Council, said "We're keen to hear from anyone who would be interested in helping us. We ask volunteers to commit two hours per week - but this can be flexible to suit them. During the sessions volunteer tutors will explain and demonstrate basic problems such as how to operate Word, open up and use email and web searching - helping to make computers less daunting for those not used to them."

If you are interested in helping please speak to a member of staff at one of the libraries mentioned or by calling 07824 406 103.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE YOUNGSTERS SET TO TAKE PART IN CRACKING FILM MAKERS SESSION

Cambridgeshire youngsters interested in film making will be able to take part in a series of masterclasses over the next two weeks. It's part of the run up to the 2012 Cambridgeshire Young People's Film Festival, which will be taking place this summer.

The sessions will be held in three schools and led by industry professionals who will show and involve children in activities and explain the essentials skills needed for film making.

- * Storyboarding - 27 February at Cherry Hinton Primary, Cambridge
- * Soundtracking - 29 February at Ely St Mary's Junior School, Ely
- * Model Making - 7 March at Burrowmoor Primary, March.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said "We're delighted to welcome back a Storyboard Artist and Modelmaker from the Aardman Studios, famous for making Wallace and Grommit, as well as a composer and performer from Seldom Scene, currently working at the Tate, London.

"The festival provides the focus and inspiration to encourage children to produce films. Work in this area really engages young people and contributes considerably to their overall literacy development."

For further information, log onto: www.filmstarz.org.uk or contact mazzie.bartimus@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

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